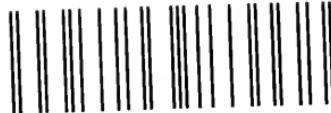


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REMARKS ON THE NAMES OF TOWNSEND HARBOR, MASSACHUSETTS, AND OF MASON HARBOR AND DUNSTABLE HARBOR, NEW HAMPSHIRE.

AT a meeting of the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, held in Boston on Thursday, February 13, 1896, Dr. SAMUEL A. GREEN said:—

Near the beginning of the present century there was a group of three villages, far from the sea-coast, lying in the same general neighborhood, on the northerly side of Groton, of which each bore in part the name of Harbor. They comprised the villages of Townsend Harbor, Mason Harbor, and Dunstable Harbor, situated respectively in the towns of Townsend, Massachusetts, and of Mason and Dunstable, New Hampshire. Two of these towns are adjacent to each other; and Dunstable, the third town, now known as Nashua, is but a short distance away. Of these several villages, Townsend Harbor is the only one which continues to bear the name.

So far as my knowledge goes, these are the sole instances in New England where the word "Harbor" is connected with the name of a settlement away from the coast-line, or from a large body of water, like the village of Centre Harbor on Lake Winnepeaukee.

Names of places all have a history of their own, connected in some way with the neighborhood, though often the origin of the name is wrapped in obscurity. It is never beneath the dignity of an historical writer to throw light on disputed subjects and to clear up doubtful points even in trivial matters.

The question naturally arises, Why were these three villages called "Harbors"? As the local antiquaries do not agree in their answer, I purpose to let them speak for themselves.

Mr. Ithamar B. Sawtelle, in his History of Townsend, gives some facts concerning a pioneer of that town, and then goes on to say:—

Nothing further is known of him except that he was in charge of a log-house made in a defensible manner against losses by the incursions of the Indians. One of these castles was located north of the Harbor and overlooking the same, and another near the meeting-house on the hill, and the same tradition further saith that the log-houses and mill, where the Harbor now stands, and the direct surroundings were called "*the Harbor*," because by signals from these three points, in case of the appearance of any "red skins," the settlers could soon reach these places of safety (pages 61, 62).

Mr. John B. Hill, in his Centennial Address at Mason, alluding to Mason Village, says in a note:—

Then called the Harbor. A word of explanation of this term may not be deemed out of place. In the early settlement of the country, towns were laid out upon the sea-coast, on which in many of them there was a bay, cove, or mouth of a river, used as a harbor for vessels. The meeting-house, where town meetings were held and public business transacted, was at the centre of the town, but it often happened that the "Harbor" was the principal if not the only mart of trade in the place. And when, in an inland town, a locality on its border became the principal mart of trade, it was known by the same name of Harbor, as Mason Harbor, Townsend Harbor, Dunstable Harbor. (Proceedings of the Centennial Celebration at Mason, August 26, 1868, page 42.)

On June 28, 1872, Mason Village was incorporated as a separate town under the name of Greenville.

Dunstable Harbor was a small settlement on the south side of Salmon Brook, near its confluence with the Merrimack River. At one time in the early part of the century the local Post-office was established there. Allusions to the place are found in Charles J. Fox's "History of the Old Township of Dunstable" (pages 193, 195, and 270).

On January 1, 1837, the name of the town of Dunstable, New Hampshire, was changed by legislative enactment to Nashua, now the second largest city in that State.



It will be noticed that Mr. Sawtelle and Mr. Hill do not agree in their theories as to the origin of the name; and I shall not attempt to decide between them. There is no account on record that Townsend was ever seriously threatened by the Indians,—with possible exceptions during the years 1747 and 1748,—though the inhabitants of the town in early times may have taken precautionary measures to ward off the attacks of the enemy. Within a short time Mr. Sawtelle has written me that formerly there was a tradition that the village was first called “Tory Harbor,” on account of the number of tories living there during the Revolution; but he is inclined to doubt it, as there were so few of that class in the immediate neighborhood. Perhaps the present designation is a survival of part of this name. In the town of Claremont, New Hampshire, there is a locality known to-day as “Tory Hole,” from the fact that it was a place of favorite resort for tories in Revolutionary times.

All these so-called Harbor villages are situated on small streams: Townsend on the Squannacook River, where there is a mill-pond; Mason on the Souhegan River, where also there is a mill-pond; and Dunstable on Salmon Brook, near the Merrimack River. Townsend Harbor is the oldest of the three settlements; and the name may have been carried, by example or through imitation, thence to Mason, which is only a few miles distant. I am inclined to think, however, that its origin was due to a popular fancy then existing in the neighborhood of giving the additional name of “Harbor” to villages of ambitious hopes.

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